sustainability

MDPI

Article

Is the Concept of Food Sovereignty Still Aligned with Sustainability Principles? Insights from a Q-Methodology Study

Serena Mandolesi [1], Ahmed Saidi [2], Teresa Del Giudice [2], Simona Naspetti [3], Raffaele Zanoli [1] and Carla Cavallo [4,*]

[1] Dipartimento di Scienze Agrarie, Alimentari e Ambientali (D3A), Università Politecnica delle Marche, 60121 Ancona, Italy; mandolesi@agrecon.univpm.it (S.M.); zanoli@agrecon.univpm.it (R.Z.)
[2] Dipartimento di Agraria, Università di Napoli Federico II, 80055 Portici, Italy; ahmed.saidi@unina.it (A.S.); teresa.delgiudice@unina.it (T.D.G.)
[3] Dipartimento di Scienze e Ingegneria della Materia, dell'Ambiente ed Urbanistica (SIMAU), Università Politecnica delle Marche, 60121 Ancona, Italy; simona@agrecon.univpm.it
[4] Dipartimento di Farmacia, Università degli Studi di Salerno, 84084 Fisciano, Italy
* Correspondence: carla.cavallo2@unisa.it

Abstract

Food sovereignty has gained significant political attention in recent years, proven by the recent change of the name of Italian Ministry of Agriculture. Coined by the transnational movement "La Via Campesina" in 1996, food sovereignty emphasizes sustainable food security and the right of populations to determine their own food policies. However, the concept is often misunderstood in the light of rising sovereigntist debate, and its original meaning, intertwined with long-term sustainability, is gradually disappearing. This study uses Q methodology to explore consumer perspectives on food sovereignty, identifying distinct groups that reflect how the concept has evolved and how it is perceived by the general population. The analysis is based on a sample of 24 participants from Italy. Starting from all sustainability issues contained in food sovereignty, relevant opinion groups have been identified. Results show that half of the groups still recognize their traditional meaning, while the other half understands food sovereignty as a modern form of autarchy.

Keywords: food sovereignty; nationalism; gastro-nationalism; workers' rights; food safety

Academic Editors: Andrei Jean Vasile, Andrea Feher and Carmen Adriana Gheorghe

Received: 23 May 2025
Revised: 18 July 2025
Accepted: 23 July 2025
Published: 30 July 2025

Citation: Mandolesi, S.; Saidi, A.; Del Giudice, T.; Naspetti, S.; Zanoli, R.; Cavallo, C. Is the Concept of Food Sovereignty Still Aligned with Sustainability Principles? Insights from a Q-Methodology Study. *Sustainability* **2025**, *17*, 6912. https://doi.org/10.3390/su17156912

1. Introduction

The concept of food sovereignty was first introduced in 1996 in South America by the Association La Via Campesina with the objective of securing food and supporting the whole food system of rural livelihoods, going beyond the concept of food security [1,2]. This concept then supports not only the access to food, but also the ownership of food and resources to the producers fighting the food regime, putting the society as a whole at the center of the food system [3].

The most representative definition was developed in 2007, with the "Declaration of Nyéléni": "Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights

to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock, and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food" [4].

While it may be an important counter-narrative of the corporate-led food industry, leading to a systemic change based upon agroecology [5] it also represents a romantic and simplistic alternative difficult to implement, as the complexity of rural systems is deeply rooted in the globalized system founded on power asymmetries and internal inequalities [6]. This is particularly true in the light of experiences in which it has been incorporated into formal policies as a result of only "poor-washing" practices [7,8].

The concept, over the years, and in different sociocultural contexts, acquired new layers of meaning; for example, the access to food has been enriched by environmental sustainability and local attributes, and the protection of small farmers in the light of decentralizing the ownership of food production and preserving local food cultures to survive [9,10].

While the link between food sovereignty and social and economic sustainability is well recognized—through the empowerment of local farming systems and the strengthening of local supply chains—it is also important to consider how different measures of self-sufficiency interact with broader sustainability goals. As discussed by Istudor et al. [11], self-sufficiency is not a monolithic concept but is analytically disaggregated into three dimensions: the self-sufficiency ratio (the share of domestic production relative to total consumption), the self-sufficiency trade offset (the surplus of domestic production beyond internal consumption), and the import dependency ratio (the proportion of consumption reliant on imports).

These indicators exhibit distinct relationships with environmental sustainability. The self-sufficiency ratio may support sustainability objectives, but its effectiveness largely depends on whether domestic production adopts environmentally sound practices—thus, the link is conditional and not always robust. In contrast, a high self-sufficiency trade offset is often negatively associated with sustainability, due to increased emissions linked to surplus production and the so-called "value leak", wherein raw commodities are exported with limited domestic value addition [12]. Finally, the sustainability implications of import dependency hinge on the environmental performance of exporting countries: imports sourced from regions with higher resource-use efficiency may theoretically reduce global environmental impact, though this benefit is context-specific and not guaranteed [13].

Food sufficiency enhances food sovereignty; however, when trade surpluses are not strategically integrated into high-value value chains, competitiveness suffers. Therefore, environmental sustainability, as a unifying factor across EU countries and promoted by CAP regulations, can pave the way for translating sufficiency and sovereignty into competitiveness [11].

In 2023, in Italy, the Agriculture Ministry defined itself as "Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests". But outside the context of a rural peasant society, what is meant by the term *food sovereignty*? The motives behind rely on the self-assigned role of the political movement of the patrol of Italian identity against "external threats", which in this case are represented by conspiracies against true Italian food tradition and production [14]. This may be the case of a reinterpretation and appropriation of a concept, as it is clearly in opposition with the original inclusivity rooted in the food sovereignty movement and neglects key issues linked to land, labor, and social justice. One of the reasons for this can be attributed to the strong roots in the Global South, particularly within peasant movements, as well as its use in Western, food-secure contexts like Italy, which remains less studied and also represents a literature gap that justifies a deeper study within the Italian context.

Therefore, in Italy, the term "food sovereignty" is assigned different meanings by different groups of people, depending on personal political ideology, but other factors

may come into play—a complexity that this study aims to substantiate through empirical evidence. This study aims to investigate different discourses regarding the concept of food sovereignty and to reveal differences and shared beliefs among the participants. Nevertheless, it is also common to find discrepancies between consumers' views and expert opinions, especially in the field of food. For example, while scientists affirm the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), many consumers perceive them as a threat [15]. Similarly, consumers often attribute greater benefits to organic food than what scientific evidence supports [16]. Additionally, food preferences frequently differ between consumers and expert tasters, revealing contrasting perceptions and evaluations [17]. Therefore, understanding consumers' perceptions and opinions may help to clarify communication gaps and foster more transparent policy discussions and more equitable food systems.

In order to capture the wide range of perspectives about food sovereignty, the Q methodology approach was adopted [18–21]. The method is particularly suitable for highlighting the diversity of opinions regarding any topic [22]. Moreover, the method uses a "qualiquantological" approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative elements [23]. Q methodology is a valuable approach to revealing minor views that cannot usually emerge in quantitative studies like surveys [24]. Contrary to R methodologies, which are based on correlating variables that can only vary quantitatively, Q seeks correlations between participants' views and does not use them to test some hypotheses a priori [25,26]. For this reason, the method is based on an "inverted" factorial analysis [19,20]. In addition, contrary to qualitative approaches such as focus groups or interviews, the use of factor analysis strengthens the power of the methodology, since it allows the study of views in a more organized manner, providing more structure to data [18,22,27]. Since the aim of the methodology is not to generalize to a broader population, the number of participants is usually small and less important than their variety and the degree of involvement with the field of study [28–32].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Q Methodology

Q methodology was invented by William Stephenson to systematically study subjectivity [20,21]. Despite initial resistance, today, Q methodology has been widely applied for studying opinions and attitudes in different research areas, including agriculture [33–35], food assurance [28], policy [18,36–38], agrobiodiversity [39], and food innovations [29,40].

The literature shows that Q methodology has already been used to reflect food sovereignty in Western countries, as by Di Masso and Zografos [41], where the meaning of this concept has been analyzed in Catalonia due to the fervent debate on food driven by critical and political consumerism and the rise of several food movements. They highlight the elements that shaped food sovereignty, both bottom-up by social activists and top-down by public administration. A study conducted in Ethiopia on food security by Jiren et al. [42] investigated how this concept is perceived by agriculture stakeholders and included some instances of food sovereignty within the Q-sample. The results indicated that they were ranked as low priority in a food security context, due to dissatisfaction towards traditional farming practices. Q methodology has also been successfully implemented in political debates, following the early discussion of [22] who indicated that it is a method that yields a nuanced view of political attitudes, ideologies, and values. Some examples can be found in the analysis of general politics as the social division behind Brexit [43], and in the analysis of agricultural economics topics, such as sustainability practices within groups of farmers [44].

In a Q study, data are collected by providing participants with a sample of items (usually written statements) that form the Q sample. More specifically, the Q sample is

a selection of statements reporting opinions surrounding the topic under investigation [22]. Participants are asked to rank the statements into a fixed quasi-normal distribution [30]. This ranking process, namely the Q sorting, allows participants to freely express their views without imposing meaning a priori or trying to test any predefined hypothesis [31,45–47].

The result of the Q sorting process is the Q sorts, representing miniatures of the participants' subjectivity. Once collected, Q sorts are correlated, and the factorial technique is used to group the different viewpoints, reducing them into a few relevant factors. According to Brown [48], the significance of factors in Q method is not only statistical but "*theoretically in terms of the social-psychological situation to which the emergent factors are functionally related*".

Typically, a Q study consists of five steps that are both qualitative and quantitative: (1) definition of the concourse, (2) selection of the statements, (3) participant sample, (4) Q sorting process, and (5) factor analysis.

2.2. Research Design and Data Collection

The first step is the collection of the statements to form the concourse, which can be defined as a universe of communication regarding the research objective [49]. Forming the concourse is an empirical experience. The aim is to represent the communications about the topic. To build the concourse, statements were collected using a multi-source approach that combined direct interviews with experts—such as academics and agricultural professionals—conducted during key events like academic project conference, along with material from grey literature (e.g., reports from FAO, the European Commission, and Slow Food), social networks (e.g., posts from recognized institutions and professionals), and mass media (e.g., national newspapers and agri-food sector outlets). In total, the concourse included over 157 written statements.

The subsequent selection of the statements is crucial. We followed the structured approach of the Fisher experimental design principles, which represents one of the best ways [50]. Using a structured approach requires the definition of categories and levels into which all statements are classified [30]. Categories and levels can be defined a priori, following a deductive approach [51]. The factorial design for this study included three categories ("Public perspective"; "Industry-producer perspective"; "Consumer perspective") and three levels ("Economic"; "Social"; "Environmental"). All statements were classified into the $3 \times 3 = 9$-cell matrix. After removing redundancies, four divergent statements were selected to obtain a balanced and heterogeneous Q sample of 36 statements.

The participant sample, indicated with the term P sample or, more appropriately, P set, is typically smaller than the Q sample, and the selection of participants is theoretical, not random [29,31,52]. Therefore, the P sample should possibly include people with diverse views about the topic independently of their personal characteristics (i.e., status, ages) [30,31]. Given in Q, the focus is on the universe of communicability, of which the Q sample represents a representative set; the P set is more like the concept of replications in an experimental setting [53] than a sample in a survey. Watts and Stenner [31], inverting the reasoning in traditional factor analysis and specifically the 2:1 ratio indicated by [54], suggest that a Q sample "contains twice as many items as you have participants". When you have more respondents than statements, in factor analysis, several issues can arise. The correlation matrix, which is fundamental to factor analysis, may become singular (i.e., non-invertible). A singular correlation matrix cannot be used in standard factor analysis because it prevents the extraction of factors, and you have to revert to principal components analysis. Another common issue is overfitting. Factor analysis may try to fit too many factors, leading to a model that describes the sample too well but generalizes poorly to other datasets. The factors derived may not be reliable because the model overfits the data.

Participants were initially recruited to reflect diverse social and demographic backgrounds—specifically varying in age, gender, and occupation—with the aim of representing a broad mix of typical consumers. In addition, political orientation was taken into account during recruitment to capture a wider range of perspectives. This approach follows established practices in Q studies, where purposive sampling often targets heterogeneity across ideological and sociocultural dimensions to explore the full range of discourses [22,31,55]. The P sample included Italian citizens (not politicians) self-identified with one of three political ideologies: left-wing, right-wing, or center) and not employed in agriculture or having family members employed in the same sector. Selected participants ranged in age from 18 to 76 years. There was an equal gender distribution (12 males and 12 females). The sample included 8 students, 14 workers, 1 retired person, and 1 unemployed individual. The composition of the P sample is reported in Table 1. Participants were recruited primarily through word of mouth, as part of a convenience sampling strategy. All participants took part in the study on a voluntary basis. Interested participants answered a brief online survey collecting demographic and other basic information, which was used iteratively to recruit a stratified sample. The study has been approved by the Ethical Committee of the University of Naples Federico II on 26 January 2024.

Table 1. The P sample of the study.

n	Gender	Age	Occupation	Declared Political View
1	F	<25	Student	Left
2	M	<25	Student	Left
3	F	<25	Student	Centre
4	M	<25	Student	Centre
5	F	<25	Worker	Right
6	M	<25	Student	Right
7	F	25–44	Student	Left
8	M	25–44	Student	Left
9	F	25–44	Student	Centre
10	M	25–44	Worker	Centre
11	F	25–44	Worker	Right
12	M	25–44	Worker	Right
13	F	45–60	Worker	Left
14	M	45–60	Worker	Left
15	F	45–60	Unemployed	Centre
16	M	45–60	Worker	Centre
17	F	45–60	Worker	Right
18	M	45–60	Worker	Right
19	F	>60	Worker	Left
20	M	>60	Worker	Left
21	F	>60	Worker	Centre
22	M	>60	Worker	Centre
23	F	>60	Retired	Right
24	M	>60	Worker	Right

As mentioned, participants are asked to rank the Q sample into a quasi-normal distribution according to a specific condition of the instruction. The ranking process allows us to obtain a snapshot of participants' views. Participants received the cards on which all statements were printed and randomly numbered, as well as the Q distribution. Then, they ranked the statements from 'least like my view' (−4) to 'most like my view' (+4), as shown in Figure 1. Despite the shape of the Q sorting distribution not influencing the results; a quasi-normal forced distribution was chosen to allow participants to make finer distinctions among statements and to force the selection of a few statements in the extremities [29].

Additionally, adhering to a specific distribution makes the sorting process "*more operant*", revealing "*greater clarity of subjectivity (item X is more significant than item Y)*" [29]. After the sorting process, post-sort interviews are collected. Participants clarified their viewpoint, providing some explanations concerning the extreme positions of their Q sorts (that is, for those statements placed under the '±4').

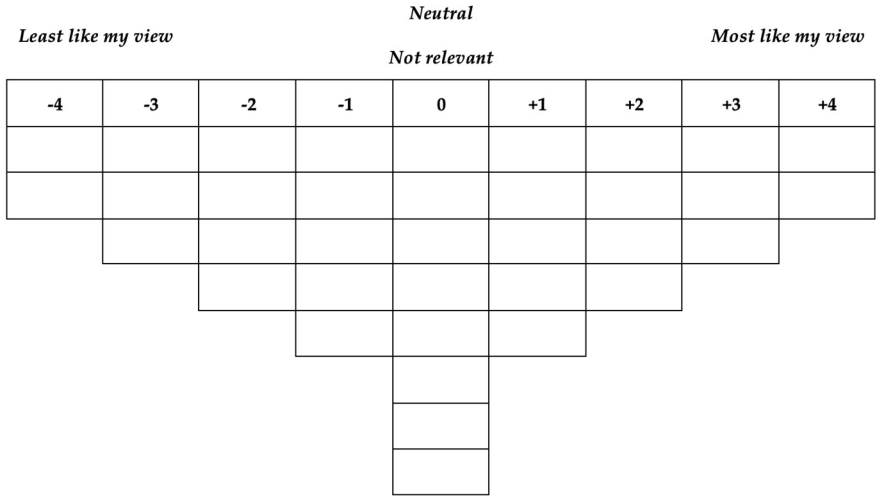

Figure 1. The Q distribution of the study.

Each participant gave written informed consent before participation. None of them received remuneration. A total of 24 Q sorts were collected.

Finally, the Q factor analysis was conducted to identify the different 'views' about the topic [22,30,31,40]. The analysis was conducted using the specific Q software KADE ver. 1.3.1 [56]. First, the correlation matrix is calculated by cross-correlating all Q sorts. The matrix is used as raw data for the subsequent factor analysis to extract the main factors by grouping participants with similar rankings into the same factors. The number of factors to extract depends on the diversity of views expressed by participants; however, different criteria can be followed [22,57].

The first criterion used to select factors was to extract those factors with an eigenvalue over 1.00 [31]. Another strategy that was also considered was Brown's rule [22]. This strategy recommends retaining those factors that have at least two significant Q sorts [22]. Also significant Q sorts at the 0.01 level are those exceeding $\pm 2.58 \times$ standard error (with standard error = $1/\sqrt{}$ (no. of statements)); that is, ± 0.43. The factors were extracted using principal component factor analysis (PCA) [30].

Several solutions were generated and compared during the factor extraction process. Ultimately, a four-factor solution was selected based on both statistical and interpretive considerations, with the aim of providing a more comprehensive representation of the range of viewpoints on the topic [31]. Two and three-factor solutions explained substantially lower total variance and included relatively weak loadings, limiting their ability to capture the diversity of perspectives. Moreover, unrotated eigenvalues greater than 1 were observed up to the seventh factor, which encouraged the exploration of solutions with more factors. Another important criterion was the interpretability of the distinguishing statements—they had to make sense. Hence, the final decision to retain four factors was not solely driven by statistical thresholds but was also informed by the qualitative distinctiveness and interpretability of the factor arrays.

The final solution was obtained by rotating the set of factors. Particularly, both varimax and manual rotations were combined [30]. Varimax rotation was used to maxi-

mize the variance between factors, while manual rotation was used to facilitate the factor interpretation [40].

3. Results

The results rely on the identification of four factors; their characteristics are reported in Table 2. The four factors explained 53% of the study's variance. Results showed that 21 Q sorts were assigned to factors, while 3 Q sorts (Q sorts 7, 10, and 16) were not assigned to any factor since their loadings were not high enough or because they were confounded (i.e., which load significantly on two or more factors) [47].

Table 2. Eigenvalues, variance explained, and correlations for each factor.

	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**
Eigenvalues	5.414	3.040	2.470	1.650
% explained variance	23	13	10	7
Cumulative % of explained. variance	23	36	46	53
Defining Q sorts	8	7	4	2
Correlations between factors				
Factor 1	1	0.138	0.2033	0.1326
Factor 2		1	0.1291	0.1945
Factor 3			1	−0.0102
Factor 4				1

Factor loadings were calculated for each Q sort, indicating the extent to which a Q sort is correlated with a given factor. All factor loadings are reported in Table 3. Participants with significantly high loading for one factor will be representative of that factor (called 'significant' or 'defining' Q sort) [22].

Table 3. Factor loadings.

n	**Factor 1**	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**
1	**0.8544**	−0.1901	0.0991	−0.0157
2	**0.8329**	0.1134	0.0369	−0.0372
3	−0.0282	**0.5792**	−0.2317	−0.015
4	**0.6826**	0.1742	−0.0489	0.0926
5	**0.6198**	0.4234	−0.0741	0.3292
6	0.0221	**0.7298**	−0.0003	0.0508
7	*0.4186*	*0.1301*	*0.5023*	*−0.4518*
8	**0.5117**	−0.2994	0.2399	0.1159
9	0.3216	−0.2149	**0.5291**	0.0498
10	*0.0984*	*0.5478*	*0.5871*	*0.2495*
11	0.2342	**0.6237**	−0.0508	−0.1934
12	−0.1429	0.1214	0.0044	**0.724**
13	**0.5607**	0.0745	0.347	0.3655
14	0.0428	**0.6143**	0.4016	−0.1076
15	**0.6868**	0.2504	−0.1248	0.1886
16	*0.4716*	*0.2199*	*0.3496*	*−0.3043*
17	0.3146	**0.4434**	0.078	0.2759
18	0.1347	**0.4697**	0.0014	−0.1352
19	−0.0059	0.0335	**0.5395**	−0.5036
20	**0.5243**	0.0864	0.0603	−0.2386

Table 3. *Cont.*

n	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
21	0.2523	−0.0458	**0.5431**	0.2972
22	−0.1188	0.3057	**0.6149**	0.1045
23	−0.1914	**0.6256**	0.0262	0.0466
24	0.3359	0.3067	−0.247	**0.5921**

Note: in bold are indicated defining sort with $p < 0.01$. In italic: sorts not assigned.

The z-scores, which indicate the relationship between statements and factors, were calculated for all statements. The z-scores are obtained as a weighted average of the scores given by the defining Q-sorts to that statement. Rounding the z-scores towards the discrete values of the Q distribution (from '−4' to '+4') allows the calculation of the factor scores, which are used to describe factors and to determine factor arrays (i.e., an 'ideal' Q sort that is characterized by the factor scores computed for each factor) [39].

Once defined as the solution (i.e., the number of factors to extract), the last step is the interpretation of factors. The researcher is asked to develop discourses or narratives based on factor arrays and the post-sort interviews of participants who loaded on that factor.

3.1. The Factors

The discourses regarding each factor are reported in this section. Table 4 reports the factor scores for each factor. The signs preceding each factor score indicate like (+) or dislike (−). From this point on, in brackets, the statement number (in bold) and related factor scores.

Table 4. The factor scores for each statement.

N	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4
1	For me, food sovereignty should put the needs of citizens above markets and businesses	+2	0 **	+3	−2 **
2	I believe that food sovereignty is important to invest in the growth of the local agri-food sector and counteract the pressure of international agricultural markets	0	+3	+4	0
3	For me, food sovereignty should promote the traceability of food	−1	+2 *	0	+4 **
4	I believe that food sovereignty is necessary to guarantee more power and income to small–medium farmers, to the detriment of large-scale distribution	+1	+3	+2	0
5	For me, food sovereignty should fight monopolies by guaranteeing access to natural resources to anyone who produces food	+1 *	+2	+2	−3 **
6	I think that food sovereignty is necessary to shield the excellence of a country by reducing imports	0	+4 *	−2	+2 *
7	I think that food sovereignty is the full food independence of a nation	−3 **	+1	+1	+1
8	I believe that food sovereignty, by hindering the globalization of consumption, contributes to reducing its environmental impact	+1 *	−1	−3 *	0
9	I think food sovereignty prevents increases in agricultural prices	−2	−1	−1	−3 **
10	I think that food sovereignty is fundamental to promoting the consumption of local products to reduce emissions	+1	+2	+2	−3 **
11	I think food sovereignty can help increase the wealth of a country	0	+4 **	−1	+1
12	I think that food sovereignty can contribute to protecting biodiversity through the consumption of local and national products	+2	+1	0	+2

Table 4. *Cont.*

N	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4
13	I think that food sovereignty should encourage the creation of a network that strengthens and links local agri-food supply chains	+2	+2	+1	+3
14	I think that food sovereignty guarantees the country's right to decide autonomously on the production and distribution of food	−1 *	0 *	−3 **	2 *
15	I think food sovereignty should put the well-being of all citizens first	+3	−3	+4	−1
16	I think food sovereignty is necessary to reduce food imports from the most polluted countries	−1	+1	−2	+1
17	I think that food sovereignty is a tool that facilitates the purchase of quality food products with lower prices	−3	−2	+3 **	−1
18	I think food sovereignty should protect producers who respect the environment	+3	+3	0	0
19	I think food sovereignty eases the ecological transition for producers	−4 **	−2 **	0	+1
20	I think food sovereignty is against the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers	−2 **	+1 **	−4	−4
21	I think that food sovereignty has nothing to do with intensive animal farming	−3	−3	+2	0
22	I think that a policy based on food sovereignty promotes landscape conservation	0	0	−1	+2 **
23	I think food sovereignty protects national natural resources such as land and water	−2	0	0	0
24	I think the concept of food sovereignty is based on the use of renewable energy	−2	−4	−2	−4
25	I think food sovereignty is in favor of reducing waste through conscious consumption	−1	0	+3 **	−1
26	I think food sovereignty means providing consumers with healthy and locally grown food	+3 **	0	+1 *	−1
27	I think that food sovereignty, putting consumers in the first place, is essential to guaranteeing access to food	0	0	0	−1
28	I think that food sovereignty should protect all producers who use traditional and artisanal production methods	+1	−1 **	+1	+4 *
29	I think food sovereignty has nothing to do with synthetic meat and edible insects	0	−3	−2	+1
30	I think that an economic policy based on food sovereignty is an effective response to any emergency (for example, the Ukraine war)	0	−2 **	+1	0
31	I think that food sovereignty must guarantee the health of consumers by promoting the Mediterranean diet	0	−1	0	+3 **
32	I think food sovereignty counters the production of chemically filled, over-processed, or GMO-infused foods	−1	+1 **	−4 **	−2
33	I think food sovereignty should protect animal welfare	+4 *	−1	−1	+3 *
34	I think that food sovereignty must deal with workers' rights and the improvement of working conditions, especially in agriculture	+4 **	−4 *	0	−2
35	I think food sovereignty should limit the use of antibiotics in farms	+2 *	0	−1	0
36	I think that food sovereignty is the only way to let individuals pursue their own cultural diversity	−4 **	−2	−3	−2

Note: loading marked with ** ($p < 0.01$) or with * ($p < 0.05$) indicates a distinguishing statement.

3.1.1. Factor 1: "Sovereignty and Rights"

This first factor, "*Sovereignty and Rights*", included eight defining Q sorts. This factor is characterized by a relatively young sample (mean age = 27), equally divided between men and women and primarily leftists (namely, five leftists, two centrists, and one rightist). According to the most distinguishing statements, food sovereignty means supporting workers' rights, especially those with fewer rights (**34**; +4 **). For example, some participants stated: "*I believe we need to pay more attention to laborers' rights. . .and evaluate minimum wages, making them more adequate for the amount of work carried out by those laborers*" (ID 1. F) and "*I believe that a consumer willing to pay a higher price should be more careful to purchase foods grown or raised with the utmost respect for natural resources and workers*" (ID 4. M). Animal welfare is another aspect linked with the concept of food sovereignty (**33**; +4 *; **35**; +2 *). For this view, animal welfare is essential and should be the base of a high-quality food supply chain and genuine foods. Animal welfare is also associated with human health. One participant stated the following: "*Animal welfare is essential, including feeding. is necessary for protecting human health*" (ID13. F). In addition, for this perspective, the consumption of local foods (**26**; +3 **) is in line with the idea of food sovereignty, which should be used to protect small farms from big industries and, in general, from globalization. According to post-sort interviews, the idea is that globalization needs to be faced due to the inequity and power asymmetries it generates. According to this view, the concept of food sovereignty has no relation with food independence (**7**; −3 **; **36**; −4 **): "*I don't think this concept is based on achieving full food independence of a country*" (ID15. F) and "*Food sovereignty is not the only path. culture is not only based on foods. but it is made up of many other things*" (ID13. F). Lastly, protecting the environment is not relevant for this view (**8**; +1 *; **19**; −4 **).

3.1.2. Factor 2: "Sovereignty, Nationalism and Safer Food"

This second factor, the "*Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Safer Food*", included seven defining Q sorts. The factor is mostly rightist (namely, five right, one left, and one center). with a mean age of about 43 years. According to this perspective, globalization with related policies is negatively perceived, since it tends to demark or eliminate the separation between internal and external affairs and the culture of a country. For this reason, the concept of food sovereignty is interpreted as a means for contrasting globalization and defending every domestic "thing". In this sense, whatever is considered culturally different should be radically contrasted (e.g., foreign products and international markets). Sentences like "to counteract the pressure of international agricultural markets" (**2**; +3), "detriment of large-scale distribution" (**4**; +3), and "reducing imports" (**6**; +4 *) can provide an alternative view of the concept of food sovereignty. Some participants added the following: "*The valorization of national resources can certainly promote the well-being of a nation*" (ID17. F) and "*Full food independence. for me. is the most adequate definition. not having to depend on other countries*" (ID 23. F). To pursue this "control", food traceability is also essential (**3**; +2 *). For this view, food sovereignty can be considered an indicator of the economic wealth of the nation (**11**; +4 **). Referring to this statement, one participant stated, "*I think that being more independent allows to increase the wealth of a nation. thus favoring the production and protection of our local products and consequently the national economy*" (ID11. F). Lastly, food sovereignty did not mean supporting workers' rights (**34**; −4 **).

3.1.3. Factor 3 "Sovereignty for a More Democratic Food System"

The third factor accounts for four Q sorts, and it is labelled "*Sovereignty for a more democratic food system*". Participants in this view are primarily centrist (one left and three center), with a mean age of about 56 years. This view links the concept of food sovereignty with consumers' well-being and their rights. More specifically, people belonging to this view

maintain that food access—as every other essential need—cannot be subjected to market dynamics (**15**; +4; **1**; +3). According to post-sort interviews, one sorter (ID 9. F) stated, "*Politics should protect the essential rights of citizens. which are not negotiable*" and "*Food sovereignty must ensure the well-being of citizens which must be democratically guaranteed to all regardless of economic ability. Nutrition is health*". Correct prices for quality foods are also relevant **17**; +3 **); one participant added the following: "*In times of recession we need to increase the accessibility of food through lower prices*" (ID 21. F). Another aspect contributing to understanding this viewpoint is the importance of purchasing healthy and local foods (**26**; +1 *; **2**; +4). However, the consumption of local foods for this factor has minor or no influence on environmental impact (**8**; −3 *), while it could favor the reduction in waste and more efficient conscious consumption (**25**; +3 **). In addition, for this perspective, the concept of food sovereignty has no relation with reducing imports or the defense of national food excellence (**6**; −2).

3.1.4. Factor 4 "Gastro-Nationalists Nutritionist"

This factor, which may be labelled "*Gastro-nationalist nutritionist,*" included two Q sorts. Participants within this factor are of the rightist political ideology; the mean age is 38. Like the second factor, this view links the concept of food sovereignty with the protection of the food excellence of a nation (**6**; −2 **). However, the importance given to traceability is much higher (**3**; +4 **). One participant underlined how "real" food sovereignty is necessary "*for avoiding the falsification of Made in Italy products*" (ID12. M). For all participants, the "Made in Italy" claim is intrinsically related to the idea of food sovereignty. Again, another stated the following: "*The concept of food sovereignty should also be this: the defense of Made in Italy and products such as Reggiano Parmesan*" (ID 24. M). Another two pivotal elements that characterize only this view are represented by the high importance given to traditional and artisanal production methods (**28**; +4 **) and to the relation between food sovereignty and the Mediterranean diet (**31**; +3 **). The importance of the Mediterranean diet model is also supported by avoiding synthetic meat and edible insects (**29**; +1). Regarding this, one participant stated, "*I think that food sovereignty is based on the defense of typical food products and on their characteristics. Introducing foods such as insects or synthetic meat into our diet is completely against the concept of food sovereignty*" (ID 24. M). The protection and consumption of high-quality local foods may also positively affect the preservation of landscapes (**22**; +2 **) and animal welfare (**33**; +3 *). For this view, high-quality local food products cannot be commercialized with low prices (**9**; −3 **). Lastly, contrary to the second factor, the country's economic growth is of minor importance (**11**; +1; **2**; 0).

3.2. Consensus

The results indicated that there are very few consensus statements—those that do not distinguish between any of the factors—among the four factors. The most relevant agreement concerns the idea that a strategy of food sovereignty may be the creation of networks among local producers and other stakeholders, improving the strength and collaboration among them (**13**; +2;+2;+1;+3). The majority of respondents share the assumption that food sovereignty is not necessarily based on the use of renewable energy (24; −2;−4;−2; 4); moreover, they also believe that sovereignty can protect the citizens' market power: "I think food sovereignty prevents increases in agricultural prices" (9; −2; −1; −1; −3 **).

4. Discussion

The current study aims to clarify the meaning of food sovereignty to a sample of Italian participants. While the traditional definition provided by Via Campesina in 1993 [58] has been partially overcome and the wealth of opinions collected reflects that it is a multifaceted

concept far beyond the mere right-left dichotomy, it is important to acknowledge that the original concept emerged from the sociopolitical context of 1990s South America, which differs markedly from the post-COVID food debates in Italy. Although it actually questioned food security in Western contexts [59,60], food access is taken for granted among modern Italian consumers, and there are other salient issues that are influenced by both the political ideas, and the food fears of individuals. Furthermore, it is noteworthy how certain new concepts in political discourse have been articulated using semantic frameworks already established in the past [61].

The dimensions highlighted by the clusters include the following:

1. Ethical Sovereignty: This dimension emphasizes universal rights, including labor rights, animal welfare, and resource protection. Sovereignty is conceived as a global responsibility that transcends national boundaries. This view endorses the original view by La Via Campesina and aligns with an ecocentric approach to governance [62]. These findings support the transition from productivist-driven food systems to ones grounded in multi-scalar accountability, where sovereignty is tied to the capacity to uphold ethical commitments across borders rather than economic performance [63]. As a result, interventions should embed normative commitment into regulatory frameworks that reshape food systems throughout by (1) adapting labelling frameworks to incorporate standardized metrics of ethical performance, including certifications, such as the fair-trade certification [64], biodiversity protection [65], and climate impact assessments, enabling consumers to make informed choices aligned with global justice values [66]; and (2) redesigning agricultural subsidy schemes and tariff exemptions to reward producers who meet verifiable ethical and environmental principles, in line with the EU Common Agriculture Policy 2023–2027, and thus shifting public support from volume-based productivity toward practices that ensure long-term ecological and social resilience.
2. Safety as Sovereignty: This dimension relates to food safety, with respondents advocating for sovereign frameworks to strengthen food safety standards that often rely on complex, transnational supply chains that expose consumers to risks such as contamination, fraud [67], and disruptions from geopolitical conflicts [68]. While food safety is already a core element of existing national and international food policy, including EU Regulation 178/2002 and Codex Alimentarius standards, our findings highlight the need to translate these frameworks into more efficient, context-responsive, and territorially grounded interventions. Strategies could be shifted towards (1) decentralizing enforcement capacity to local or regional authorities trained in risk-based food inspection tailored to the specific products and processes of the territory and (2) simplifying compliance for smallholders through fit-for-purpose regulations and accessible technologies such as streamlined protocols and a mobile-based self-assessment tool that will eventually reduce exclusion from formal markets, enhance inclusivity without compromising public health standards, and (3) improve food safety throughout the integration of territorial development with food planning strategies, including agroecology, nutrition, and climate adaptation.
3. Democratic Access: This cluster underlines democratic control over food systems and the wide access to high-quality food for all. The current food sovereignty discourse often overlooks the institutional mechanisms needed to guarantee democratic participation in food system governance, particularly in urban settings where populations are food-dependent but politically marginalized [5,69]. This gap limits the transformative potential of food sovereignty, reducing it to a rhetorical ideal rather than a framework for structural inclusion. To address this, food sovereignty must be expanded to include concrete, institutionalized pathways for public participation in decision-making, re-

source allocation, and policy design, thus moving beyond democratic infrastructures that ensure sustained civic engagement. It is essential to institutionalize participatory governance through local food policy councils or citizen food boards with formal decision-making power and inclusive representation, particularly from marginalized communities. Democratic consultation should be embedded in municipal and regional food planning, with co-design and co-implementation processes integrated into legislation and budget cycles. Urban land and infrastructure policies must also prioritize access for community-run markets, food hubs, and cooperative enterprises, supported through targeted land-use reforms and funding mechanisms.

4. Decolonial and National Sovereignty: This cluster endorses the right of citizens to make decisions about national agricultural policies, emphasizing the decolonization of food systems and empowering local populations. Alonso-Fradejas et al. [69] discuss how food sovereignty acts as resistance against global corporate dominance in agriculture, favoring models where local and national needs dictate food policy. The emphasis on national sovereignty signals a pushback against the homogenizing effects of globalization, advocating instead for policy frameworks that prioritize localized knowledge, cultural specificity, and community empowerment, in line with democratic access. The respondents all shared views about the achievement of environmental goals linked to food production, and this confirms the increasing concern of all groups of consumers towards the impact on the planet [70,71]. A closely linked concept that is highlighted by all respondents is that they expect food sovereignty to foster local supply chains. This meaning was present in the original definition, but with the aim of protecting vulnerable countries from industrialization, which exports capital and resources abroad, impoverishing local populations and damaging the environment [72]. This also confirms a current trend fostered especially by the COVID-19 crisis, which, during an extreme emergency, showed the resilience of the food supply chain, thanks to the work of small and local producers that guaranteed access to food in Western countries when the population was limited by lockdowns [73,74].

These dimensions stray from what has traditionally been defined as food sovereignty, confirming what was stated about the raising of multiple and competing sovereignties [58,75,76] and supporting the concept by the right-wing Italian government, which is leveraging the modern sources of food insecurity brought by international crises and food innovation to promote national produce [77].

The results also show that consumers are divided into two main groups based largely on political views: one supporting universal, global approaches to agriculture and food, and the other favoring sovereign, nationalistic, and autocratic perspectives on food production. On one side, we have Factors 1 and 3 that perceive food sovereignty in line with the first view of "La Via Campesina". These two views recognize food sovereignty's role in contrasting the State and capitalism as causes of inequities and injustices, as well as of the alienation between producers and consumers [78,79]. This aspect seems to fit mostly with some definitions of food justice [61]. They do not identify food sovereignty with national products protectionism. On the other side, Factors 2 and 4 articulate a "rightist" perspective on food sovereignty, framing it as an emergency measure that emphasizes national boundaries to limit the power of multinationals and food independence as a policy solution [80–82]. In this case, it seems that the protection towards local producers may not be motivated by an anti-capitalist movement; however, we can trace back this instance to the fascist policy that used food as propaganda to build a national identity [5,83]; therefore, it is currently resurging as a promoted conspiratorial narrative against the Italian agri-food system [84]. The attitude that Made in Italy cannot bring low prices also yields the view that Italian products do not need to be subsidized by the government, but, in contrast,

are sustained by consumers who state their political ideas through their purchases [85]. These concepts stray from what has traditionally defined food sovereignty [86], confirming what was stated about the raising of multiple and competing sovereignties [58,75,76,87] and supporting the concept by the right-wing Italian government, which is leveraging the modern sources of food insecurity brought by international crises and food innovation to promote national produce [77].

This study presents some limitations. Given that Q methodology allows for interpretive depth, sacrificing statistical representativeness; rather, its goal is to capture a wide spectrum of subjectivities relevant to the research question. Unlike surveys, which generalize findings to a population, Q studies generalize to a universe of communicability—that is, to the words that represent shared meanings and shape our interpretative frameworks. The P sample may have been stratified along socioculturally grounded food practice typologies to understand how values, behaviors, and ideologies relate to the statements being sorted. Similarly, although educational background was not used as a selection criterion, its inclusion may have revealed further nuances. In contemporary contexts, educational trajectories are increasingly non-linear and diverse, and do not always reflect traditional hierarchies of knowledge or status.

Sample selection may benefit from greater inclusivity, as limited samples often risk misrepresenting groups such as migrant workers, smallholders, and urban food-insecure communities, who, despite participating in political debates, primarily bear the consequences of food sovereignty. This limitation can be addressed in future research by deliberately including a broader range of participants to better capture these critical perspectives.

Future research could focus on cross-national and longitudinal studies to better understand how perceptions of food sovereignty differ across countries and change over time. Since food sovereignty is closely linked to political discourse, globalization, migration, environmental challenges, and evolving consumer behaviors, this approach would offer valuable insights for designing resilient and culturally relevant food systems.

5. Conclusions

This study focused on investigating the perception and role of food sovereignty in Italy. Using the name of the Italian Ministry responsible for agricultural policies as a point of departure, the research explored how the concept of food sovereignty has evolved from its original definition in South America to its contemporary interpretations in Italy.

Through Q methodology, four distinct clusters emerged, reflecting societal responses to globalization-induced disorientation and revealing a collective need for governance that provides both security and belonging: “Sovereignty and Rights,” “Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Safer Food,” “Sovereignty for a More Democratic Food System,” and “Gastronationalist Nutritionist”. Two clusters aligned with leftist progressive ideals, while the other two emphasized national pride and protectionism. While these clusters effectively illustrate the complexity and multifaceted nature of food sovereignty, the fragmentation of views raises important questions for theory and practice as it challenges the coherence of food sovereignty as a unifying framework. The division between clusters endorsing more inclusive, justice-oriented approaches and those emphasizing national protectionism and autocracy reveals underlying tensions between universal sustainability goals and territorially bounded interests. This polarization suggests that food sovereignty, while still relevant, is not a monolithic concept easily aligned with sustainability in practice. Rather, its interpretation depends heavily on ideological lenses that shape governance priorities and policy responses. Thus, policymakers should move beyond simplistic applications of food sovereignty and design adaptable, multi-scalar frameworks that facilitate dialogue, contestation, and co-creation among diverse stakeholders.

This study's strength lies in its use of Q methodology, which uncovers nuanced subjective viewpoints often missed by quantitative surveys, and its focus on Italy's unique agricultural and post-COVID context offers valuable geographic and sociopolitical insights. However, the sample may not represent all relevant demographics, limiting the generalizability of the results. Additionally, while Q methodology reveals patterns of thought, it does not measure their prevalence or directly connect them to behavior or policy outcomes. Therefore, future research should aim to quantify these clusters within broader and more diverse populations, investigate how these ideological divides influence food system governance, and conduct comparative studies across different Western countries. Such work can deepen our understanding of how food sovereignty is operationalized and inform the design of governance mechanisms that foster more sustainable, equitable, and culturally resonant food systems.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, S.M. and C.C.; Methodology, S.M.; Formal analysis, S.M.; Investigation, C.C.; Writing—original draft, S.M. and C.C.; Writing—review & editing, S.M., A.S., T.D.G., S.N., R.Z. and C.C.; Supervision, C.C.; Funding acquisition, R.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Italian Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies (MIPAAF) Project "PROTEINE PER LA FILIERA AVICOLA" (PROFILA)—CUP E78D19000810001.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical Approval by Comitato Etico Per Le Attivita' Non Biomediche (CERSUB) of University of Naples Federico II, code PG/2024/0011629, 29 January 2024.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. FAO. *An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security*; FAO: Rome, Italy, 2008.
2. Maudrie, T.L.; Nguyen, C.J.; Wilbur, R.E.; Mucioki, M.; Clyma, K.R.; Ferguson, G.L.; Jernigan, V.B.B. Food Security and Food Sovereignty: The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving. *Health Promot. Pract.* **2023**, *24*, 1075–1079. [CrossRef]
3. Rodríguez, F.; Varrotti, A.P.S. Thirty years of sowing hope to globalise the struggle: Women and youth of La Via Campesina in the construction of food sovereignty–a conversation. *J. Peasant. Stud.* **2023**, *50*, 559–577. [CrossRef]
4. Dessì, A.; Nonne, M.F.; Nonne, P. Food Sovereignty-Brief Outline of the Basic Concepts. Adapted from "Sovranità Alimentare-una Nuova Prospettiva su Agric-oltura e Alimentazione". 2009. Available online: https://vsf-international.org/project/food-sovereignty-brief-outline-of-the-basic-concepts/ (accessed on 22 July 2025).
5. Edelman, M.; Weis, T.; Baviskar, A.; Borras, S.M.; Holt-Giménez, E.; Kandiyoti, D.; Wolford, W. Introduction: Critical perspectives on food sovereignty. *J. Peasant. Stud.* **2014**, *41*, 911–931. [CrossRef]
6. Bernstein, H. Food sovereignty via the 'peasant way': A sceptical view. *J. Peasant. Stud.* **2014**, *41*, 1031–1063. [CrossRef]
7. Fisher, C. Selling coffee, or selling out? Evaluating different ways to analyze the fair-trade system. *Cult. Agric.* **2007**, *29*, 78–88. [CrossRef]
8. Sylla, N. *The Fair Trade Scandal: Marketing Poverty to Benefit the Rich*; Pluto: London, UK, 2014.
9. Marsden, T.; Morley, A. *Sustainable Food Systems: Building a New Paradigm*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2014; pp. 1–231. [CrossRef]
10. Matacena, R.; Corvo, P. Practices of Food Sovereignty in Italy and England: Short Food Supply Chains and the Promise of De-Commodification. *Sociol. Rural.* **2020**, *60*, 414–437. [CrossRef]
11. Istudor, N.; Constantin, M.; Privitera, D.; Ignat, R.; Petrescu, I.-E.; Teodor, C. Systemic Competitiveness in the EU Cereal Value Chain: A Network Perspective for Policy Alignment. *Land* **2025**, *14*, 731. [CrossRef]
12. Rumankova, L.; Kuzmenko, E.; Benesova, I.; Smutka, L. Selected EU Countries Crop Trade Competitiveness from the Perspective of the Czech Republic. *Agriculture* **2022**, *12*, 127. [CrossRef]
13. Avetisyan, M.; Hertel, T.; Sampson, G. Is local food more environmentally friendly? The GHG emissions impacts of consuming imported versus domestically produced food. *Environ. Resour. Econ.* **2014**, *58*, 415–462. [CrossRef]
14. Cuccu, L.; Pontarollo, N. Logistic hubs and support for radical-right populism: Evidence from Italy. *Eur. J. Politi Econ.* **2024**, *82*, 102522. [CrossRef]

15. Klümper, W.; Qaim, M. A Meta-Analysis of the Impacts of Genetically Modified Crops. *PLoS ONE* **2014**, *9*, e111629. [CrossRef]
16. Apaolaza, V.; Hartmann, P.; D'souza, C.; López, C.M. Eat organic–Feel good? The relationship between organic food consumption, health concern and subjective wellbeing. *Food Qual. Prefer.* **2018**, *63*, 51–62. [CrossRef]
17. Caracciolo, F.; Cavallo, C.; Del Giudice, T.; Panico, T.; Vecchio, R.; Cicia, G. Consumers (Dis)Preference for Bitterness in Extra Virgin Olive Oil: A Field Experiment. *Int. J. Food Syst. Dyn.* **2020**, *11*, 14–25. [CrossRef]
18. Barry, J.; Proops, J. Seeking sustainability discourses with Q methodology. *Ecol. Econ.* **1999**, *28*, 337–345. [CrossRef]
19. Phelps, J.; Zabala, A.; Daeli, W.; Carmenta, R. Experts and resource users split over solutions to peatland fires. *World Dev.* **2021**, *146*, 105594. [CrossRef]
20. Stephenson, W. Technique of Factor Analysis. *Nature* **1935**, *136*, 297. [CrossRef]
21. Stephenson, W. *The Study of Behavior: Q-Technique and Its Methodology*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 1953.
22. Brown, S.R. *Political Subjectivity: Applications of Q Methodology in Political Science*; Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, USA, 1980.
23. Stenner, P.; Rogers, R.S. Q methodology and qualiquantology: The example of discriminating between emotions. In *Mixing Methods in Psychology*; Psychology Press: London, UK, 2004; pp. 99–118. [CrossRef]
24. Robert, N.; Soma, T.; Mullinix, K. Neoliberal growth vs food system democratization: Narrative analysis of Canadian federal and civil society agri-food policy. *Agric. Hum. Values* **2024**, *42*, 923–943. [CrossRef]
25. Ramlo, S. Mixed method lessons learned from 80 years of Q Methodology. *J. Mix. Methods Res.* **2016**, *10*, 28–45. [CrossRef]
26. Stenner, P. Q Methodology as Qualiquantology: Comment on Susan Ramlo and Isadore Newman's "Q Methodology and Its Position in the Mixed-Methods Continuum". *Operant. Subj.* **2011**, *34*, 192–203.
27. Brown, S.R. On the use of variance designs in Q Methodology. *Psychol. Rec.* **1970**, *20*, 179–189. [CrossRef]
28. Eden, S.; Bear, C.; Walker, G. The sceptical consumer? Exploring views about food assurance. *Food Policy* **2008**, *33*, 624–630. [CrossRef]
29. Mandolesi, S.; Naspetti, S.; Zanoli, R. Exploring edible insects' acceptance through subjective perceptions: A visual Q study. *J. Insects Food Feed.* **2022**, *8*, 565–577. [CrossRef]
30. McKeown, B.; Thomas, D.B. *Q Methodology (Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences Book 66)*, 2nd ed.; (Newbury Park); Sage Publications: New York, NY, USA, 2013.
31. Watts, S.; Stenner, P. *Doing Q Methodological Research: Theory, Method and Interpretation*; Sage Pubblication Ltd.: New York, NY, USA, 2012; Volume 2.
32. Weitzman, J.; Bailey, M. Perceptions of aquaculture ecolabels: A multi-stakeholder approach in Nova Scotia, Canada. *Mar. Policy* **2018**, *87*, 12–22. [CrossRef]
33. Hu, Y.-F.; You, F.; Luo, Q.-Y. Characterizing the attitudes of the grain-planting farmers of Huaihe Basin, China. *Food Policy* **2018**, *79*, 224–234. [CrossRef]
34. Mandolesi, S.; Nicholas, P.; Naspetti, S.; Zanoli, R. Identifying viewpoints on innovation in low-input and organic dairy supply chains: A Q-methodological study. *Food Policy* **2015**, *54*, 25–34. [CrossRef]
35. Zanoli, R.; Cuoco, E.; Barabanova, Y.; Mandolesi, S.; Naspetti, S. Using Q methodology to facilitate the establishment of the 2030 vision for the EU organic sector. *Org. Agric.* **2018**, *8*, 265–273. [CrossRef]
36. Astari, A.J.; Lovett, J.C. Does the rise of transnational governance 'hollow-out' the state? Discourse analysis of the mandatory Indonesian sustainable palm oil policy. *World Dev.* **2019**, *117*, 1–12. [CrossRef]
37. Michaud-Létourneau, I.; Pelletier, D.L. Perspectives on the coordination of multisectoral nutrition in Mozambique and an emerging framework. *Food Policy* **2017**, *70*, 84–97. [CrossRef]
38. Ober, C.; Canessa, C.; Frick, F.; Sauer, J. The role of behavioural factors in accepting agri-environmental contracts-Evidence from a Q-method and thematic analysis in Germany. *Ecol. Econ.* **2025**, *231*, 108544. [CrossRef]
39. Nordhagen, S.; Pascual, U.; Drucker, A.G. Gendered differences in crop diversity choices: A case study from Papua New Guinea. *World Dev.* **2021**, *137*, 105134. [CrossRef]
40. Mandolesi, S.; Kilic, B.; Naspetti, S.; Zanoli, R. Switching to bio-based packaging for organic products: Supply chain actors' perspectives. *Org. Agric.* **2023**, *14*, 181–197. [CrossRef]
41. Di Masso, M.; Zografos, C. Constructing food sovereignty in Catalonia: Different narratives for transformative action. *Agric. Hum. Values* **2015**, *32*, 183–198. [CrossRef]
42. Jiren, T.S.; Dorresteijn, I.; Hanspach, J.; Schultner, J.; Bergsten, A.; Manlosa, A.; Jager, N.; Senbeta, F.; Fischer, J. Alternative discourses around the governance of food security: A case study from Ethiopia. *Glob. Food Secur.* **2020**, *24*, 100338. [CrossRef]
43. Curtice, J. Brexit: Behind the Referendum. *Political Insight* **2016**, *7*, 4–7. [CrossRef]
44. Taylor, W.R.; Borron, A.; Holt, J.; Monfort, S. Assessing Farmers' Perceptions of Best Management Practices: An Exploration of the Viewpoints of Cotton and Peanut Farmers in Georgia using Q Methodology. *J. Appl. Commun.* **2024**, *108*, 6. [CrossRef]
45. Cuppen, E.; Breukers, S.; Hisschemöller, M.; Bergsma, E. Q methodology to select participants for a stakeholder dialogue on energy options from biomass in the Netherlands. *Ecol. Econ.* **2010**, *69*, 579–591. [CrossRef]
46. Stephenson, W. Scientific creed—1961: Abductory principles. *Psychol. Rec.* **1961**, *11*, 9–17. [CrossRef]
47. Watts, S.; Stenner, P. Doing Q ethodology: Theory, method and interpretation. *Qual. Res. Psychol.* **2005**, *2*, 67–91. [CrossRef]

48. Brown, S.R. The Importance of Factors in Q Methodology: Statistical and Theoretical Considerations. *Operant. Subj.* **1978**, *1*. [CrossRef]
49. Stephenson, W. Protoconcursus: The Concourse Theory of Communication. *Operant. Subj.* **1986**, *9*, 37–58. [CrossRef]
50. Fisher, R.A. *The Design of Experiments*; Oliver and Boyd: Edinburgh, Scotland, 1960. [CrossRef]
51. Dryzek, J.S.; Berejikian, J. Reconstructive democratic theory. *Am. Political Sci. Rev.* **1993**, *87*, 48–60. [CrossRef]
52. Webler, T.; Danielson, S.; Tuler, S. Using Q method to reveal social perspectives in environmental research. *Soc. Environ. Res.* **2009**, *54*, 45. Available online: https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Qprimer.pdf (accessed on 22 July 2025).
53. Coleman, R. Designing Experiments for the Social Sciences: How to Plan, Create, and Execute Research Using Experiments (T. O. (CA) Sage, Ed.). 2019. Available online: https://methods.sagepub.com/book/mono/designing-experiments-for-the-social-sciences/toc (accessed on 5 June 2024).
54. Kline, P. *An Easy Guide to Factor Analysis*; Routledge: London, UK, 2014. [CrossRef]
55. Beckham Hooff, S.; Botetzagias, I.; Kizos, A. Seeing the Wind (Farm): Applying Q-methodology to Understand the Public's Reception of the Visuals Around a Wind Farm Development. *Environ. Commun.* **2017**, *11*, 700–722. [CrossRef]
56. Banasick, S. KADE: A desktop application for Q methodology. *J. Open Source Softw.* **2019**, *4*, 1360. [CrossRef]
57. Sneegas, G.; Beckner, S.; Brannstrom, C.; Jepson, W.; Lee, K.; Seghezzo, L. Using Q-methodology in environmental sustainability research: A bibliometric analysis and systematic review. *Ecol. Econ.* **2021**, *180*, 106864. [CrossRef]
58. Claeys, P. Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue From Food Sovereignty to Peasants' Rights: An Overview of La Via Campesina's Rights-Based Claims over the Last 20 Years. 14 October 2013. Available online: https://www.tni.org/files/download/24_claeys_2013-1.pdf (accessed on 5 June 2024).
59. Cavallo, C.; Sacchi, G.; Carfora, V. Resilience effects in food consumption behaviour at the time of COVID-19: Perspectives from Italy. *Heliyon* **2020**, *6*, e05676. [CrossRef]
60. Clendenning, J.; Dressler, W.H.; Richards, C. Food justice or food sovereignty? Understanding the rise of urban food movements in the USA. *Agric. Hum. Values* **2016**, *33*, 165–177. [CrossRef]
61. Radaelli, C.M. Occupy the semantic space! Opening up the language of better regulation. *J. Eur. Public. Policy* **2023**, *30*, 1860–1883. [CrossRef]
62. Desmarais, A.A.; Wittman, H. Farmers, foodies and First Nations: Getting to food sovereignty in Canada. *J. Peasant. Stud.* **2014**, *41*, 1153–1173. [CrossRef]
63. Resler, M.L. Augmenting agroecological urbanism: The intersection of food sovereignty and food democracy. *Agroecol. Sustain. Food Syst.* **2021**, *45*, 320–343. [CrossRef]
64. Clark, P.; Hussey, I. Fair trade certification as oversight: An analysis of fair trade international and the small producers' symbol. *New Political Econ.* **2015**, *21*, 220–237. [CrossRef]
65. Perfecto, I.; Vandermeer, J.; Wright, A. *Nature's Matrix: Linking Agriculture, Biodiversity Conservation and Food Sovereignty*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2019.
66. Settee, P. The impact of climate change on Indigenous food sovereignty. In *Indigenous Food Systems: Concepts, Cases, and Conversations*; Canadian Scholars: Toronto, ON, Canada, 2020; pp. 211–228.
67. Esteki, M.; Regueiro, J.; Simal-Gándara, J. Tackling Fraudsters with Global Strategies to Expose Fraud in the Food Chain. *Compr. Rev. Food Sci. Food Saf.* **2019**, *18*, 425–440. [CrossRef]
68. Wittman, H.; Desmarais, A.; Wiebe, N. The origins and potential of food sovereignty. In *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature, and Community*; Food First Books: Oakland, CA, USA, 2010; p. 2.
69. Agarwal, B. Food sovereignty, food security and democratic choice: Critical contradictions, difficult conciliations. *J. Peasant. Stud.* **2014**, *41*, 1247–1268. [CrossRef]
70. Alonso-Fradejas, A.; Borras, S.M.; Holmes, T.; Holt-Giménez, E.; Robbins, M.J. Food sovereignty: Convergence and contradictions, conditions and challenges. *Third World Q.* **2015**, *36*, 431–448. [CrossRef]
71. Khan, M.S.; Saengon, P.; Alganad, A.M.N.; Chongcharoen, D.; Farrukh, M. Consumer green behaviour: An approach towards environmental sustainability. *Sustain. Dev.* **2020**, *28*, 1168–1180. [CrossRef]
72. Patel, K.; Gartaula, H.; Johnson, D.; Karthikeyan, M. The interplay between household food security and wellbeing among small-scale farmers in the context of rapid agrarian change in India. *Agric. Food Secur.* **2015**, *4*, 16. [CrossRef]
73. Mintel. Global Food and Drink Trends. 2024. Available online: https://insights.mintel.com/rs/193-JGD-439/images/Mintel_2024_Global_Food_and_Drink_Trends_English.pdf (accessed on 5 June 2025).
74. McMichael, P. A food regime analysis of the "world food crisis". *Agric. Hum. Values* **2009**, *26*, 281–295. [CrossRef]
75. Angelo, B.E.; Jablonski, B.B.; Thilmany, D.; Griffith, C. Meta-analysis of U.S. intermediated food markets: Measuring what matters. *Br. Food J.* **2016**, *118*, 1146–1162. [CrossRef]
76. Chiffoleau, Y.; Dourian, T. Sustainable Food Supply Chains: Is Shortening the Answer? A Literature Review for a Research and Innovation Agenda. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 9831. [CrossRef]
77. Abdul, M.; Ingabire, A.; Lam, C.Y.N.; Bennett, B.; Menzel, K.; MacKenzie-Shalders, K.; Van Herwerden, L. Indigenous food sovereignty assessment—A systematic literature review. *Nutr. Diet.* **2024**, *81*, 12–27. [CrossRef]

78. Amante, A.; Balmer, C. Italy Agriculture Minister Says "Slush" Lab-Food Threatens Quality Products | Reuters. 8 May 2023. Available online: https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-agriculture-minister-says-slush-lab-food-threatens-quality-products-2023-05-08/ (accessed on 5 June 2025).
79. Wiarda, M.; Doorn, N. Responsible innovation and societal challenges: The multi-scalarity dilemma. *J. Responsible Technol.* **2023**, *16*, 100072. [CrossRef]
80. Trauger, A. Towards a geographic theory of food sovereignty in the United States. In Proceedings of the Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue, International Conference, Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA, 14–15 September 2013; pp. 1–20. Available online: https://www.tni.org/en/publication/towards-a-geographic-theory-of-food-sovereignty-in-the-united-states (accessed on 14 February 2024).
81. Altieri, M.A.; Nicholls, C.I. Scaling up Agroecological Approaches for Food Sovereignty in Latin America. *Development* **2008**, *51*, 472–480. [CrossRef]
82. Bello, W. *The Food Wars*; Verso Books: New York, NY, USA, 2009.
83. Pellizzoni, L.; Centemeri, L.; Benegiamo, M.; Panico, C. A new food security approach? Continuity and novelty in the European Union's turn to preparedness. *Agric. Hum. Values* **2025**, *42*, 89–105. [CrossRef]
84. Helstosky, C. Fascist food politics: Mussolini's policy of alimentary sovereignty. *J. Mod. Ital. Stud.* **2004**, *9*, 1–26. [CrossRef]
85. Wilks, M.; Phillips, C.J.C.; Fielding, K.; Hornsey, M.J. Testing potential psychological predictors of attitudes towards cultured meat. *Appetite* **2019**, *136*, 137–145. [CrossRef]
86. Guthman, J. Neoliberalism and the making of food politics in California. *Geoforum* **2008**, *39*, 1171–1183. [CrossRef]
87. Shattuck, A.; Schiavoni, C.M.; VanGelder, Z. Translating the Politics of Food Sovereignty: Digging into Contradictions, Uncovering New Dimensions. *Globalizations* **2015**, *12*, 421–433. [CrossRef]